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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN OPPOSITION LEADER REQUESTS ASYLUM IN PERU

REF: A. CARACAS 503
[1](#)B. APRIL 21 LUDWIG-NGUTTER EMAIL

Classified By: Amb. P Michael McKinley for reasons 1.4b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Former Venezuelan presidential candidate and Mayor of Maracaibo Manuel Rosales has solicited political asylum in Peru. Claiming Rosales was the object of a political witchhunt in Venezuela, APRA Congressman Javier Valle Riestra in an April 21 press conference urged the Government of Peru to approve Rosales' request. (Rosales has the support of the ruling APRA-party, and Valle Riestra invoked the historical persecution of APRA leaders in underscoring this support.) Foreign Ministry contacts said a special MFA commission would be established to analyze the paperwork, interview Rosales and make a formal recommendation. Most observers believe the GOP is likely to approve the request, which has generated great speculation about its ramifications for Peru's relations with Venezuela. The Foreign Minister told the Ambassador he was seeking to call his Venezuelan counterpart but that Rosales' press statements had complicated the situation for the GOP. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Confirming earlier news reports, former Venezuelan presidential candidate and Mayor of Maracaibo Manuel Rosales has petitioned for political asylum in Peru. According to MFA contacts, the Ministry received the pertinent paperwork on April 21 and has already begun processing the request.

[1](#)3. (C) In a late afternoon April 21 press conference in Congress, APRA Congressman and noted lawyer Javier Valle Riestra publicly announced Rosales' decision to seek political asylum in Peru, arguing the Venezuelan opposition leader was the object of political persecution by the Government of Venezuela and by President Chavez himself. Valle Riestra cited Chavez's repeated public declarations that he would take Rosales down and "imprison" him, arguing that the legal case against him was pre-cooked and manifestly political. Valle Riestra urged the Government of Peru to stand by its democratic principles and grant Rosales political asylum.

[1](#)4. (C) Rosales' asylum hopes have the firm political and emotional support of the ruling-APRA party. Valle Riestra invoked the history of political persecution of illustrious APRA-party leaders, including party founder Victor Raul Haya de la Torre -- who was expelled from Peru and forced to live in exile in Mexico, Chile, Cuba and other countries in the

20s and 30s -- and current President Alan Garcia, who fled Peru and spent one year in Colombia and seven years in France soon after then-President Fujimori shut down the Congress in 1992. Former Prime Minister and APRA stalwart Jorge del Castillo indicated to Pol/C that he was helping to facilitate Rosales' request, and another APRA insider said the entire party, including President Garcia, was on board. He explained that political persecution was a deeply felt issue for many APRA party activists, and that Rosales' request would enjoy great sympathy in Peru for this and other reasons.

15. (C) A Foreign Ministry contact told us that, according to laws governing political asylum in Peru, the MFA would establish an "ad hoc commission" to review the request. The commission was constituted by the Director General for Human Rights, the Director General for the Americas, and the Venezuela desk. This commission would examine the evidence, interview Rosales, get input from Peru's Embassy in Caracas regarding his bona fides and reputation, then write a report and bring its formal recommendation to the MFA Vice Minister and Secretary General, who would make the Ministry's determination. The MFA official acknowledged that the intense media and political interest in Rosales had lifted the case beyond the technical realm into the political sphere, and said that any final decision would necessarily receive the blessing of the Foreign Minister and President. Foreign Minister Garcia Belaunde told reporters that the review process would take at least two weeks.

16. (C) Most observers believe the GOP is likely to approve the asylum request. Rosales' extensive network of contacts within the APRA party are sympathetic and actively

supportive. Other political parties such as the PPC look favorably on the request based on doubts that Rosales would receive due process in his home country. The GOP approved the similar, if somewhat lower profile, asylum requests of Venezuelan opposition governor Eduardo Lapi and former Union leader Carlos Ortega in 2007. The Garcia government's off and on diplomatic tensions with the BRV have generally stemmed from alleged interference in Peru's internal affairs, including the establishment of ALBA houses and reported financing of Peru's radical opposition groups. But the increasingly autocratic turn of Venezuelan President Chavez -- his efforts to dismantle checks and balances and emasculate the political opposition -- has also raised concerns. These factors are likely to work in favor of Rosales' petition.

17. (C) The Rosales situation has generated much speculation about its effects on Peru's relations with Venezuela. Some observers have claimed it was a carefully planned opportunity for Garcia to stick his rival Chavez in the eye, others that it is an undesired political hot potato that the government unfortunately now has to deal with as carefully as it can. Seeking to calm the diplomatic waters in advance, Foreign Minister Garcia Belaunde publicly stated that the government would examine the request dispassionately while underscoring that, according to asylum law, Rosales could not and should not use Peru as a platform from which to advance his political interests in Venezuela or to criticize President Chavez. Garcia Belaunde told the Ambassador he was attempting to call his Venezuelan counterpart but that Rosales' inflammatory press statements had made the situation more complicated for the GOP. He said he had even left a Cabinet meeting early in order to publicly caution Rosales about the need to keep quiet.

MCKINLEY